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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000386

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - REMOVING CAPTION

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PTER PREL IN

SUBJECT: SIKH BEHEADED IN PAKISTAN, OUTRAGE IN INDIA
(CORRECTED COPY- REMOVING CAPTION)

REF: NEW DELHI 358

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¶1. SUMMARY: On the eve of the February 25 Foreign Secretary talks between India and Pakistan, reports of the beheading of a Pakistani Sikh sparked outrage in India. Protests and media coverage across India indicate a broad level of anger at the beheading, directed equally at the Taliban, Pakistan and the Indian government. Some observers questioned the advisability of resuming talks with Pakistan. Responding to the public anger, the Foreign Secretary told the press that she expressed India's grave concern at the incident during her February 25 talks with her Pakistani counterpart (RefTel). External Affairs Minister Krishna made a statement in Parliament strongly condemning the beheading.
END SUMMARY

Widespread Outrage

¶2. February 21 reports of the recovery of beheaded bodies of one or more Pakistani Sikhs in the Tirah Valley of the Khyber Agency triggered immediate outrage and protests in India. Anger was directed at the Taliban for its inhuman brutality, Pakistan for allowing such an atrocity to occur, and the Indian government for not somehow preventing such violence. While scattered protests occurred through the Sikh-majority state of Punjab, expressions of anger were not confined to Punjab alone. Protests in Delhi, Amritsar, and in the Jammu region were covered prominently by media across India. News stories and editorials in the vernacular and regional media have taken up the story in many parts of India. The beheading has led some commentators to question the resumption of Foreign-Secretary level talks with Pakistan.

¶3. Manjit Singh, president of the opposition Shiromani Akali Dal's (SAD) Delhi wing, led a protest in the capital and demanded that the GOI cease talks with Pakistan until "they stop attacking India and minorities." On February 22,

senior leaders from the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Punjab wing protested at the Indo-Pak border crossing at Wagah. Calling the act "barbaric and intolerable," they burnt effigies symbolizing the Taliban. Members of Parliament from the opposition BJP, SAD, and Bahujan Samaj Party met with PM Singh, himself a Sikh, exhorting the GOI to do more. Senior BJP leader S.S. Ahluwalia asked the PM to pressure the Government of Pakistan to grant safe passage for Sikhs from unsafe areas. On a visit to India, a sobbing Tarunjit Singh, Lahore-based sole Sikh anchor on Pakistan government-controlled PTV and cousin of the beheaded victim Jaspal Singh, called on the Indian government to grant asylum or visas to Sikhs living around Peshawar, so they can settle in India to escape on-going violent threats to minorities in Pakistan.

GOI Reacts

¶4. External Affairs Minister Krishna made a statement in the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) on February 24 strongly condemning the beheading of Jaspal Singh. Krishna claimed that Pakistan President Zardari condemned the murder in strong terms and promised swift action. He also said that the GOI would bring up the issue during talks with Pakistan. In her news conference following the conclusion of the February 25 Indo-Pak talks, Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao noted that she conveyed India's grave concern at the incident and urged Pakistan to take steps to protect its minority communities.

Do More!

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¶5. Comment: Contacts say that Sikh community does not think the GOI is doing enough to protect the lives of Sikhs living abroad. Reports that the Sikh community in the United States has appealed to President Obama to step in and do more to protect minorities living in Pakistan are making the press rounds in India. As with previous such incidents of violence against Indians in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, the anger will likely pass unless there are more such occurrences, in which case the pressure will again mount on GOI to "do something." Stories about Indians being assaulted or killed anywhere in the world frequently appear in the press with the admonition that the GOI is not doing enough to protect its citizens. END COMMENT

ROEMER